

Understanding the Wholesome and the Unwholesome

The Buddha always advises us to improve our correct vision (Right Understanding or *Sammāditthi*) about the world and ourselves. All Buddhist teachings focus on Liberation from suffering. People suffer because of negative thoughts which are unwholesome emotions such as greed, anger and especially delusion. As much as unwholesome thoughts are decreased, suffering also gradually decreases. Also simultaneously positive thoughts such as generosity, kindness, compassion, gratitude and wisdom gradually increase. If someone hopes to go on the path of liberation, he should have enough knowledge about freedom from suffering. Here listening to what the Buddha taught (*Saddamma savanam* = සද්ධම්මසවණං) and wise reflection (*Yonisomanasikāra* = යෝනිසෝ මනසිකාර) on what we have listened are very helpful to go forward getting rid of suffering. Listening to the Dhamma and wise reflection are useful for us to realize right understanding about the world and ourselves. Right Understanding is the main reason determining whether we are on the path of liberation. Therefore, Buddhism always has given the priority to improving the Right Understanding.

The Buddha has pointed out two paths which are the heavenly path (*Sagga magga* = සභ්ගමභ්ග) and the enlightenment (deliverance / liberation) path (*Mokkhamagga* = මොක්ඛමභ්ග) to the world kindly. According to listeners' courage, dedication and wisdom, they are able to go forward on these paths. The heavenly path describes how to be reborn in the human realm and heavenly realm. Enlightenment path describes how to achieve enlightenment going away from the circle of rebirth. The Right Understanding that we receive through listening to the Dhamma increases the understanding of both paths above.

When we discuss about Right Understanding in Buddhism, the discourse of *Sammaditthi* (Sutta) in Majjima Nikaya is very important. As much as if disciples can listen to what the Buddha explained, they understand the path of liberation. According to the *Sammaditthi Sutta*, Ven. Sariputta explains 15 ways to achieve *Sammaditthi* (or Right Vision). Among them, understanding of the unwholesome, the wholesome and their roots is the first technique (or practice).

If someone can understand the unwholesome, the roots of the unwholesome, the wholesome and the roots of the wholesome, he can go forward on the path of liberation. With this understanding he is one of right view, whose view is straight, who has unwavering confidence in the Dhamma and has arrived at this true Dhamma.

Here the ten unwholesome deeds which are made behaviorally, verbally and mentally are described. They are:

1. Killing living beings is unwholesome (*Pānātipātā*)
2. Taking what is not given is unwholesome (*Adinnādānā*)
3. Misconduct in sensual pleasures is unwholesome (*Kāmesumicchācārā*)
4. False speech is unwholesome (*Musāvādā*)
5. Malicious speech is unwholesome (*Pisunāvācā*)

6. Harsh speech is unwholesome (*Pharusāvācā*)
7. Gossip is unwholesome (*Sampapphalāpā*)
8. Covetousness is unwholesome (*Abhijjhā*)
9. Ill will is unwholesome (*Vyāpādo*)
10. Wrong view is unwholesome (*Micchāditthi*)

This is called the unwholesome. These ten are the main unwholesome deeds which disturb our peace of mind. Killing living beings, malicious speech, harsh speech and ill will arise because of the root of anger. Also, stealing, misconduct in sensual pleasures, false speech and covetousness arise because of the root of greed. Gossip and wrong view arise because of the root of delusion.

Subsequently, Ven. Sariputta explains what the root of the unwholesome is. There are three major unwholesome roots which create the wholesome deeds which happen behaviorally, verbally and mentally.

1. Greed is a root of the unwholesome (*Lobho*)
2. Hate is a root of the unwholesome (*Doso*)
3. Delusion is a root of the unwholesome (*Moho*)

These are called the roots of the unwholesome.

Then, Ven. Sariputta describes what the wholesome is. There are ten wholesome deeds which occur behaviorally, verbally and mentally.

1. Abstention from killing living beings is wholesome (*Pānātipātā Pativirato hoti*)
2. Abstention from taking what is not given is wholesome (*Adinnādānā Pativirato hoti*)
3. Abstention from misconduct in sensual pleasures is wholesome (*Kāmesumicchācārā Pativirato hoti*)
4. Abstention from false speech is wholesome (*Musāvādā Pativirato hoti*)
5. Abstention from malicious speech is wholesome (*Pisunāvācā Pativirato hoti*)
6. Abstention from harsh speech is wholesome (*Pharusāvācā Pativirato hoti*)
7. Abstention from gossip is wholesome (*Sampapphalāpā Pativirato hoti*)
8. Uncovetousness is wholesome (*Anabhijjhā*)
9. Non-ill will is wholesome (*Avyāpādo*)
10. Right view is wholesome (*Sammāditthi*)

This is called the wholesome. These ten are the main wholesome deeds which purify our mind and bring our peace of mind.

Furthermore, Ven. Sariputta explains kindly what the roots of the wholesome are. There are three major wholesome roots which stop unwholesome deeds and develop wholesome deeds which occur behaviorally, verbally and mentally.

1. Non-greed (Generosity) is a root of the wholesome
2. Non-hate (Loving kindness - *Mettā*) is a root of the wholesome
3. Non-delusion (Wisdom - *Pannā*) is a root of the wholesome.

This is called the root of the wholesome. As much as we can develop these three major wholesome roots, we can overcome unwholesome deeds and develop wholesome deeds in our lives gradually.

When we have thus understood the unwholesome and the root of the unwholesome, the wholesome and the root of the wholesome, we entirely abandon the underlying tendency to lust, we abolish the underlying tendency to aversion, we extirpate the underlying tendency to the view and conceit 'I am,' and by abandoning ignorance and arousing true knowledge here and now makes an end of suffering. In that way too a noble disciple is one of right view, whose view is straight, who has unwavering confidence in the Dhamma, and has arrived at this true Dhamma.

With the knowledge of the wholesome, unwholesome and their roots, the Buddha's disciples go forward on the path of heaven and the path of deliverance. Every moment they try to decrease unwholesome roots and increase wholesome roots as much as they can. And, they dedicate their entire lives to purify their minds for liberation from all kinds of sufferings.

The very first advice that the Buddha has given is the heavenly path. As much as a disciple of the Buddha listens to what the Buddha said, that disciple's knowledge in the Karmic law gradually develops. And his understanding of karma and re-birth improves. This understanding is named in Buddhism as *Kamassakatā Sammāditti* (කම්මස්සකතා සම්මාදිට්ඨි). The Buddha's main purpose was to save people from the lower realms like animal realm and ghost realm etc. The possibility to fall dawn is the biggest challenge for everyone. That is why the Buddha advised not to do any evil (*Sabba pāpassa akaranam* = සබ්බපාපස්ස අකරණං) and to practice good deeds in his sermons. It is not only enough to be away from unwholesome deeds for success in life, but also practice good deeds as much as possible. Buddhism describes three meritorious deeds as the path of heavenly and human realms. They are,

1. Generosity (*Dāna* = දාන)
2. Morality (*Seela* = සීල)
3. Meditation (*Bhāvanā* = භාවනා)

If someone offers something to others kindly respecting or concerning their qualities and needs, that is generosity. This can be practiced as offering materials, saving lives and giving Dhamma or advising. When anybody practices generosity, his mind is calm, quiet, meritorious and pure. That pure mind brings happiness. Morality means discipline in speech and behavior. The Buddha kindly says when you do something reflect on it again and again whether it is correct and useful. If someone acts with this awareness, he has no mistakes or misbehaviors. Then he has no regrets about his activities. And he can remember his past with a happy mind, so moral life also brings happiness. Meditation means cultivating, developing and purifying mind. Meditation decorates our minds with positive thoughts. Using some kinds of meditation techniques, if someone cultivates his mind, he can keep away his mind from negative thoughts such as anger. By practicing these three meritorious deeds, we can decrease defilements like desire, anger and delusion. When someone purifies his mind from these kinds of negative emotions, his mind is full with happiness. The Buddha says that practicing merits means practicing happiness (*Sukho Punnassa Uccayo* = සුඛෝ පුඤ්ඤස්ස උච්චයෝ). Therefore, the Buddha

always encourages us to do merits as much as we can. When mind is pure, quiet and calm, the body also is relaxed and healthy. Then the body is quiet and calm as well as the mind. Someone's proficiency depends on how far he is clever to keep his mind pure, quiet and calm since he is so happy at that moment. According to Buddhism, practicing merits helps people to go to the heavenly realm and come back to the human realm, so having these kinds of blissful life is described as Saggamagga in Buddhism. By the power of doing three meritorious deeds, we can not only achieve good lives hereafter, but we can reduce the power of some previous negative karmic energy and spend a more successful life here.

The second and very important as well as unique path that the Buddha has explained is the enlightenment path. Here the Buddha has pointed out the real path to eradicate all unwholesome roots.

According to Buddhism the main reason why suffering arises is ignorance (or delusion). Our highest success of life depends on how far we have reduced ignorance. When we experience something through our senses, it arises at the moment with the conditions. Also the experience ceases at the moment without anything remaining. However, we mostly think that after we see or hear something, it remains. This misunderstanding is the main nature of ignorance. At the very beginning of the path of reducing ignorance, we should have a clear knowledge of the dependent origination. Understanding of Buddhism depends on understanding of the Dependent Origination.

He who sees the Dependent Origination sees the Dhamma
(*Yo paticcasamuppādam passati so dhammam passati*)

He who sees the Dhamma sees the Buddha
(*Yo dhammam passati so mam passati*)

This is the real way how to see the Dhamma and the Buddha as well.

Understanding of the dependent origination depends on understanding of the five aggregates. If we have some sort of experience through our senses, it means five aggregates arise together and they cease together at the same moment. It is instant. As a result of the union of the five aggregates, when factors are together, we have experiences through our senses such as eye, ear, nose, tongue, body. When factors (or conditions) are separated, the experience ceases. The highest intelligence in Buddhism is the intelligence that "**Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) will not come to (the future) occurrence**" (*Ahutvā sambhutam hutvā na bhavissati* - අහුත්වා සම්භුතං හුත්වා න භවිස්සති). If we can understand this ultimate truth practicing insight meditation, that is the only way to get rid of suffering. Five aggregates are: matter (*Rupa*-රූප), feelings (*Vedanā*-වේදනා), perception (*Saññā*-සංකල්පනා), mental formations (*Sankhāra*-සංඛාර) and consciousness (*Viññāna*-විඤ්ඤාණ). When we experience through our senses about the world, these five aggregates arise together. They can't be separated. As the result of arising of these five things, we have an experience. These five aggregates suddenly arise and also cease instantly. When we experience something, they have not only arisen but ceased also. When we experience something through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue or body, these five senses can't get pleasure or pain. As soon as those experiences ceased instantly, we get pleasure or pain in the sense of mind as a past experience. However, we think that we

experience in the present because of ignorance. That is why we suffer. If we can understand that these five aggregates arise and cease at the moment with the condition, we are able to understand its impermanence. Then we know we have nothing to desire or hate. It means we have overcome suffering. As much as we have this understanding and reflecting on it in every moment, we have liberated from unsatisfactoriness.

Understanding of the Dependent Origination causes us to understand suffering, and understanding suffering helps to understand the Four Noble Truths which is the main teaching in Buddhism. Arising five aggregates is the first noble truth. Desire, the origin of suffering, which arises because of ignorance, is the second noble truth. Getting rid of suffering is the third noble truth. The path that leads to get rid of suffering is the noble eightfold path which can be separated into three disciplines: virtue, concentration and wisdom.

Virtue, concentration (or tranquility) and wisdom with understanding of dependent origination allow us to get rid of all sufferings and develop real happiness. Virtue means a very high level of discipline in behavior and speech with right vision. With good discipline, if a person focuses his mind on a particular meritorious object such as loving kindness or breathing meditation, then he can concentrate his mind with pure thoughts. With that concentration, one has to reflect on the world reality according to impermanence (*Anicca*), suffering (*Dukkha*) and selflessness (*Anatta*) in the correct way. As a result, one can live without desire and hatred because there is no delusion. When he investigates that present moment, he has only the present moment which didn't come from the past and which doesn't go the future from the present. He sees very well the arising and ceasing of all his experiences at the moment. He doesn't catch anything as 'I', 'my' or 'mine'. He has realized everything as impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, egolessness. Then he can live as a person seeing the truth in a new fresh way. This is the ultimate truth that Buddhism teaches us to be able to get rid of all sufferings.

According to the Sammaditthi Sutta, understanding of Karmic Law is one of the ways that leads to achieve the Right Understanding which helps us to go on the path of liberation.

May the Triple Gem Bless You!

(තෙරුවන් සරණයි!)

May All Beings be Well, Happy and Peaceful!

(සියලු සත්ත්වයෝ සුවපත් වෙත්වා!)

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